

So, how to sum up?

The most-asked question (other than, "Did a real barber cut your hair?") has been this: How could you produce six columns a week, year after year, without going nuts?

The answer is simple: for several years I did the Federal Diary column seven days a week. When they gave me Saturdays off, it removed all the pressure. Almost all.

Secondly, it was part of the job description.

Finally, I loved every minute of it. Honest.

Being here for nearly four decades has been an incredible and enriching experience. You can't imagine.

Over the years—in the line of duty—I have been shot at, gassed, tossed off a building. I covered the first Beatles concert and got to be one of the first people to circle the Capital Beltway. I was once run out of a small town in Western Maryland by a mob that, now that I think about it, had good reason to speed my departure from its fair community.

Being a newspaper reporter means never having to grow up. I got to see how things work, or are supposed to, or don't. The events and machines and tours were fascinating. The people—almost without exception—were wonderful.

Reporters get to meet lots of VIPs. But for most of us "beat" reporters, the best part is the so-called ordinary people who, more often than not, are extraordinary. Just quieter than VIPs. The reason they are so good is simple: It's part of their job description. They say (by the way, in all these years I have never discovered who "they" are) that reporters are only as good as their sources. True, up to a point. Sources are critical. But the real secret weapon for a successful reporter has two parts:

The people (as in colleagues) you work with.

The people (as in readers) you work for.

It is that simple, and that complicated.

Working with several generations of Washington Post types has been an education. Trust me on that one.

Reporters get the glory. But they only look good if they have great editors, researchers and backup. And reporters wouldn't last a minute, and you would never read their award-winning words, if it weren't for the people who do the real work. Like sell and process ads, make sure folks get billed and paid—so we can get paid—and produce and deliver the paper. For 25 cents you get, every day, the equivalent of a book printed overnight. Not a bad deal.

Working with, and writing about, federal employees and military personnel has been a treat. If there are more dedicated people in this country, I have yet to meet them. I have known lots of people who would die for this country, and several who did. Few bankers, columnists, lawyers or CEOs can make that claim.

Bureaucrats—and I don't have to say this anymore—are indeed beautiful. And don't you forget it.

I could go on, but I hope you get the idea. Besides, time and space—as always—are limited.

So has this been fun? And rewarding? Short answer: You bet!

But this isn't a wake. Or even a goodbye. More in the order of see-you-later. I hope.

Next stop for me is the brave new world of the Internet. I'll be at 1825 I St. NW, Suite 400, Washington, D.C. 20006. Stay in touch.

I'm leaving here, but The Post will always be home. Always.

This column has been around since the 1930s. It's been on loan to me for a long time. My successor, Stephen Barr, is an old friend. He's a Texan and a Vietnam vet, and he knows the beat. Best of all, he's a very nice guy.

I hope Steve has as much fun as I did. Remember, he's had nearly half a century to prepare for his first column, which will begin Sunday. But he will have only one day to write his second column. So a little help and encouragement from you would be nice.

Thanks.

Mike

UNION PACKAGING—NEW PHILADELPHIA MINORITY ENTERPRISE

HON. CHAKA FATTAH

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 9, 2000

Mr. FATTAH. Mr. Speaker, today I recognize a significant new minority enterprise in the Philadelphia area, Union Packaging, and its African-American president, Michael Pearson. Union Packaging was launched in December of last year by a \$25.8 million 3-year contract to supply paper cartons to 2,300 McDonald's restaurants along the east coast. As a minority supplier, Union Packaging joins a growing force that last year provided over \$3 billion in goods and services to the McDonald's system. The contract with McDonald's gives Pearson, as he says, "an opportunity to provide a vehicle for job creation and to be a linchpin for rebirth" in West Philadelphia. It reflects McDonald's commitment to investing in the community. Last year, the company brought new life and opportunities to our inner city by relocating one of its five divisional headquarters there. Mr. Speaker, I ask that this article on Union Packaging, published in the March 22, 2000, issue of Philadelphia Inquirer, be placed in the RECORD and I encourage my colleagues to read the account of this exciting new venture.

[From the Philadelphia Inquirer, Mar. 22, 2000]

PACKED UP AND RARIN' TO GO

MCDONALD'S HAS CONTRACTED WITH UNION PACKAGING, A MINORITY BUSINESS, TO SUPPLY CARTONS FOR ITS FOOD

(By Rosland Briggs-Gammon)

The warehouse at Union Packaging L.L.C. is filled with empty McDonald's apple pie and chicken nugget cartons. They are some of the first of millions of fast-food cartons awaiting distribution to 2,300 McDonald's locations along the East Coast. The Yeadon company, a joint venture between two area product packaging firms, has a new three-year, \$25.8 million contract to supply the paper cartons to McDonald's.

It is McDonald Corp.'s first minority business enterprise contract in the Philadelphia area, and Union Packaging's first account. The two companies celebrated at an open house yesterday.

Michael Pearson, president of Union Packaging, opened the plant in January at an industrial park that sits near the border of Delaware and Philadelphia Counties.

The company is a joint venture between Providence Packaging Inc., owned by Pearson, and Dopaco Inc., a packaging firm in Exton. The partnership allows Union Packaging, 51 percent owned by Pearson, who is African American, to bid on corporate contracts as a minority-owned business.

The partnership also allows Union Packaging to delay purchasing printing equipment until next year. In the interim, Dopaco prints and cuts the paper used to make the cartons. Dopaco also has lent the company experienced employees to help train its workers and start production.

"It is so expensive to get into business," said Dopaco's chairman and chief executive officer Edward Fitts. "Dopaco has expensive equipment already so Union Packaging doesn't have to make an investment in equipment right now. That's the kind of relationship that will help minority firms."

Such partnerships are becoming more common, said Lynda Ireland, president of the New York/New Jersey Minority Purchasing Council. Similar partnerships started in the construction industry, she said. "It is certainly something we are trying to encourage," Ireland said. "To get into the corporate-America arena, you have to be creative."

Pearson, 38, spent three years working for a packaging firm in New York. Using his experience there, he decided to start his own business. As the first step of his three-step plan, he launched Providence, which also sells packaging products, in 1997, using Dopaco as the outside production firm.

Union Packaging, with its limited production capabilities, is his second step, he said. He launched the firm with a bid for the McDonald's contract, which was awarded to Union Packaging in December. Also last year, McDonald's moved its Northeast region headquarters to Philadelphia.

"When we brought the Northeast division here, we wanted to bring jobs to the area," said William Lowery Jr., a senior vice president with McDonald's Northeast division. "This is one of the ways we can do that and give back to the community."

To start Union Packaging, Pearson received a \$200,000 opportunity grant and \$300,000 in tax credits from the state of Pennsylvania for creating new jobs. The money will help finance equipment purchases. One machine that folds and glues the boxes can cost between \$300,000 and \$500,000, Pearson said.

Dopaco ships the printed and cut paper to Union Packaging's 65,000-square-foot plant. There, employees feed the small sheets through machinery that glues one edge and creates fold marks to transform the sheets into boxes.

At the end of the production line, the flattened boxes are packaged and sealed for shipment. Joe DeBernardi, plant superintendent, said the line produces about 60,000 boxes an hour. Two other machines do the same for chicken nugget containers.

The company has hired 20 people and hopes to have a staff of 100 within two years, Pearson said. The company chose its site because of the worker base in West Philadelphia and its location near graphics, engineering and other service firms, and because of the expansion possibilities. Union Packaging's lease includes the option to add up to 300,000 square feet of space adjacent to its building.

"It's an opportunity to provide a vehicle for job creation and to be a linchpin for rebirth in this area," Pearson said.

EQUAL PAY DAY RESOLUTION

HON. NEIL ABERCROMBIE

OF HAWAII

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 9, 2000

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce a resolution with Representative CONSTANCE MORELLA to recognize the significance of May 11th as Equal Pay Day. May 11, 2000, is the day when women's wages for the period beginning January 1, 1999, will equal the amount earned by a man during calendar year 1999. Equal Pay Day